

WCA Agriculture Topic Comments

Gregory Denton - February 1, 2026

Agriculture needs to figure more prominently in Island County goals and planning. In particular, global heating and the resulting destabilizing effects on our ecosystems present outsized challenges to our county. Specific comments to agriculture goals and policies were presented during the previous review period (see email of 7/18/2025 from greg.denton@gmail.com), these comments refer to the narratives currently open to review.

The Climate Element draft planning Goals 3.4 and 8 address some farm operations training and farmland preservation issues. But draft plans, in general, need to better meet all the challenges. The plans too often emphasize the value of quaint farmland vistas over the reality of our community's increasingly grave need for food security via our local farmers and farms.

Major Areas to Address

- Food production and supply chains are increasingly under environmental stress.
- Financial obstacles to farming continue to mount. Farming must be economically viable work or there will be no farms.
- Agroecological farming practices enhance natural habitats and create a productive and resilient food supply. Similarly, surrounding natural habitats enhance farmlands.
- Local food is healthier, lower in emissions, and critical for our growing food insecure communities.

We strongly endorse ARCC's call for an **Agricultural Advisory Committee** or **Ombudsman** in order for the county to adequately address all of these pressing needs for local agriculture using the best advice possible, from farmers themselves. Other counties in the state follow this practice.

Specific Comments

| Element | Page | Section | Draft Text | Proposed | Comment |
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| Land Use | 1 | 1.1 INTRODUCTION | ...protecting its one-of-a-kind landscape, unique ecology, and natural resources. | ...protecting its one-of-a-kind landscape, unique ecology, natural resources, and farmlands . | Agriculture is a particularly important use of land and needs to be mentioned. |
| Land Use | 1 | 1.1 INTRODUCTION | These goals and policies provide a land use foundation to develop a healthy, diverse economy where employment, housing, and retail opportunities abound. | These goals and policies provide a land use foundation to develop a healthy, diverse economy where employment, housing, retail, and farming opportunities abound. | Land use planning must explicitly support farming. |

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| Land Use | 4 | 1.3.1.1 AGRICULTURE | Agriculture is an important part of life in Island County, providing jobs, preserving open space, contributing to local food production, and drawing business, residents, and tourists to the area. | Agriculture is an important part of life in Island County, providing jobs, preserving open space, and drawing business, residents, and tourists to the area. Food grown locally for Island County communities is healthier, lower in carbon emissions, enhances food security, and is more resilient to supply chain disruptions. | Call out additional important benefits of local food. |
| Land Use | 5 | 1.3.1.1 AGRICULTURE | Agricultural lands are an important component of Island County's rural atmosphere, which attracts residents and tourists and can also play an important role in improving air and water quality, and wildlife habitat. | Agricultural lands are an important component of Island County's rural atmosphere, which attracts residents and tourists, and, when following good agroecological practices, can also play an important role in improving air and water quality, and wildlife habitat. | Use of herbicides, pesticides, and excess fertilizer degrade ecosystems. Only agroecological operations provide habitat benefits. |
| Land Use | 5 | 1.3.1.1 AGRICULTURE | Conserving productive agricultural soils and encouraging farming operations as economically viable activities (and as an accepted way of life) is a major challenge in Island County. | Conserving productive agricultural soils and encouraging farming operations as economically viable and ecologically valuable activities (and as an accepted way of life) is a major goal and challenge in Island County. | Preserving and increasing farming and, in particular, agroecological farming, must be a major goal of the plan. |
| Land Use | 5 | 1.3.1.1 AGRICULTURE | Significant efforts have been made to preserve agricultural lands... | Significant efforts have been made and shall continue to preserve agricultural lands... | Talking about the past does not make a plan for the future. |
| Land Use | 5 | 1.3.1.3 RURAL TO URBAN SHIFT | A key concept is directing future growth and development within existing dense areas (i.e. LAMIRDs, UGAs) to conserve Island County's 5 DRAFT Island County 2025 Comprehensive Plan – LAND USE ELEMENT natural resources, critical areas, open space, and rural characteristics. | A key concept is directing future growth and development within existing dense areas (i.e. LAMIRDs, UGAs) to conserve Island County's 5 DRAFT Island County 2025 Comprehensive Plan – LAND USE ELEMENT natural resources, critical areas, open space, farmlands , and rural characteristics. | Explicitly mention farmlands. |
| Land Use | 7 | 1.3.2.4 SMALL-SCALE RECREATION AND TOURISM | Small-scale recreation and tourist uses include things such as golf courses, equestrian centers, wineries, tasting rooms, parks, rural event centers, and restaurants. | Small-scale recreation and tourist uses include things such as golf courses, equestrian centers, wineries, tasting rooms, parks, rural event centers, restaurants, and farm stands and markets . | Fresh, locally-grown food and products are a draw for visitors. |

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| Land Use | 17 | 1.5 RURAL ELEMENT DESIGNATIONS | The rural element of Island County contains LAMIRDs and general rural land use designations. These include areas of rural development and lands that are not designated for urban growth, agriculture, forest, or mineral resources. | | Are farmlands Rural Lands or not? |
| Land Use | 22 | 1.6 RURAL AREAS | Rural lands are lands located outside of UGAs, and lands designated as agricultural, forest, or mineral resource lands. | | Are farmlands Rural Lands or not? |
| Land Use | 31 | Table 1-1 Rural Lands Designation Criteria | Associated Zones: - Rural Agriculture - Commercial Agriculture ... | | "Rural Agriculture" is not defined anywhere. Also, agriculture (of any type) is not a "Rural Land" according to 1.5 and 1.6 citations above. An import planning goal must be to preserve (and expand) agriculture, and because of the many references to agricultural land in several of the Elements (e.g. the "buffer" policies in Natural Resources), it should receive its own designation. |
| Natural Resources | 1 | 6.1.1 DEFINITION OF NATURAL RESOURCES | Natural resources are natural materials, substances, processes or organisms that people and wildlife depend on for clean air, clean water, enjoyment, and production of products that can be potentially useful for economic gain. | Natural resources are natural materials, substances, processes or organisms that people and wildlife depend on for clean air, clean water, food , enjoyment, and production of products that can be potentially useful for economic gain. | Agriculture is (correctly) recognized in the Introduction, but its importance for supplying healthy, local food is a missing dependency here. |
| Natural Resources | 9 | 6.4.3.1 Agriculture | However, these lands are recognized as an important and limited resource which can provide a community with both environmental and economic value. | However, these lands are recognized as an important and limited resource which can provide a community with food security, as well as both environmental and economic value. | Locally grown food has many important benefits. |
| Natural Resources | 11 | 6.4.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURAL LANDS IN ISLAND COUNTY | In addition to their aesthetic values, these lands also play important roles in air and water quality, climate resilience, and wildlife habitat. | In addition to their aesthetic values, these lands also play important roles in air and water quality, climate resilience, wildlife habitat, and food security . | Locally grown food has many important benefits. |

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| Natural Resources | 11 | 6.4.4.1 Agricultural Land Conservation | Conserving productive agricultural soils and encouraging farming operations as economically viable activity... | Conserving productive agricultural soils and encouraging farming operations as supporting farmers to make farming an economically viable activity... | Farmers do not need to be "encouraged" to be economically viable, they need support in the face of increasing financial impediments. |
| Natural Resources | 11 | 6.4.4.1 Agricultural Land Conservation | Significant efforts have been made to preserve agricultural lands of key aesthetic and historical significance, and where viable farming is continuing, through public purchase of easements or of the land itself. | Significant efforts have been made shall be strengthened to preserve agricultural lands of key aesthetic and historical significance, and where viable farming is continuing, through public purchase of easements or of the land itself and other programs . | The critical nature and mounting difficulties of farming need to be tackled head on. |
| Natural Resources | 12 | 6.4.4.1 Agricultural Land Conservation | Small farms are gaining increased importance in the county...It is important that the County recognize the changing trends of farming in the county and provide for the appropriate land use regulations to allow them to prosper. | Small farms are gaining increased importance in the county...It is important that the County recognize the changing trends of farming in the county and provide for the appropriate land use regulations and economic and services support for to allow them to prosper. | More services are needed to support farms of less than 20 acres. |